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2005 Special Report on Education

Dear Friends,

I'm devoting this entire newsletter to our most important priority: the education of Washington's children and youth.

Most people in our legislative district agree with our state Constitution that education is the paramount duty of government. I'm proud Seattle has a strong record of supporting schools and school levies. But we need our Legislature to do a good job of supporting and improving schools, too, and there is much room for improvement.

I hope you'll take a moment to look through my first newsletter of 2005.

You'll see brief articles on state funding of schools and colleges, plus articles about legislation I'm working on to: protect school water against lead and other contaminants, improve education for disabled children, prevent dropouts, and improve training of security personnel at schools. Your feedback is welcome and desired!



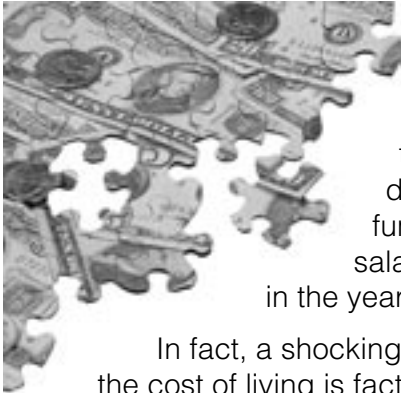
Important notice: although my Ballard District Office is closed during the legislative session, you can easily get a message to me quickly by sending an email, calling my Olympia office, or using the toll-free Legislative Hotline. Please remember that I value and enjoy hearing from you and that serving you is why I'm here.

Sincerely,

Mary Lou Dickerson

Mary Lou

Funding Schools: We Must Do Better



Our Seattle schools are facing expected budget deficits through the year 2009! Grossly inadequate state funding for schools is a large part of the problem. Due to recent state budget deficits, the Legislature has *still* not fully funded the class-size (I-728) and teacher-salary (I-732) initiatives that voters approved in the year 2000.

In fact, a shocking new national report shows that, when the cost of living is factored in, Washington ranks 42nd of the 50 states in education funding – that's eighth from the *bottom*, not the top. Recent state budgets have shortchanged our commitment to decent teacher salaries and reasonable class sizes. For the sake of Washington's children and future, we must do better.

Unfortunately, despite cutting more than \$4 billion in expected state spending in recent years, we're facing another state budget deficit of well over \$1 billion this year. The good news is that our economy and

state revenues are beginning to rebound, but not fast enough to generate the revenue levels our schools need.

I will strongly support improving state funding for education — including an increase in teacher salaries — even if we need to find additional revenues to do so. Washington's children deserve great schools and teachers, and scrimping on education would be penny wise and pound foolish.



Coe Elementary School is a great asset to Queen Anne.

Lead in School Water?

Children's health and parents' rights

Parents have enough to worry about. They shouldn't have to worry about whether their local school's drinking water contains

lead or other contaminants.

But last year, water quality tests again showed

high levels of lead in a large

number of Seattle schools. And frankly, the Seattle School District did a poor job of informing parents about the test results.

While I am pleased the district has pledged to do a better job of informing parents, state law should require healthy school buildings and respect for a parent's right to know about potential health risks. I'm working with parents and experts for a "Healthy Schools" agenda that includes:

- (1) A law to ensure that parents are told, in a timely manner, about potential problems with school drinking water, soil (etc.) and,
- (2) a public oversight committee to develop a state action plan for health-related school building issues. I will report back on this issue later in the session.



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Fine young people such as those in Ballard's Cub Scouts Pack 100 deserve great schools.

Helping Young Kids With Disabilities

We have a moral and legal duty to teach children with disabilities to reach their full potentials. It is a very expensive responsibility. But there is good news: roughly half of Washington's school districts have discovered that birth-to-three programs for children with disabilities work so well that they reduce the need for expensive "special education" in grades K-12 by 20 percent!

I'm proposing that *all* school districts either have, or contract with the private sector to provide, birth-to-three programs for these children by the year 2008. I'm proud the Superintendent of Public Instruction agrees my legislation will be good for kids and good for our schools.

Simple Majority

Every year in Washington, school levies fail despite winning 58% or 59% of the vote – which would be called "landslides" for other ballot initiatives or any election for public office. It just doesn't make sense that we require a super-majority (60% + 1) of voters to approve school



levies but only a simple majority (50% + 1) to approve a sports stadium.

I've joined 35 other Democrats and Republicans in proposing that we present to voters a state constitutional amendment that would apply the basic principle of "majority rules" to school levies. This is not only fair, it is essential to helping com-

munities support local schools. I've proposed similar bills in the past, but this year I feel confident we'll prevail.

Preventing Dropouts = Preventing Tragedies

Did you know that more than one third of Washington's public school students drop out of school or fail to graduate on time? Or that in some minority communities, *fewer than half* of males stay in school and graduate on time? This crisis of low graduation rates imposes

terrible human and taxpayer costs. We

see it in crime rates, public assistance costs, teen pregnancies, remedial education costs, and on and on.



There are no magic answers to the dropout crisis, but I'm working with other lawmakers to develop dropout prevention strategies that emphasize best practices and that are affordable and effective. It will not be a "one size fits all" approach, since we know that cultural relevance and programs tailored to student and community needs work best. But our strategy will make dropout prevention and on-time graduation the priorities they need to be.

Opening the Doors of College Opportunity

I'm very proud my daughter Chloe graduated from Garfield High School and is now attending Western Washington University. But I also know that thousands of deserving Washington students are finding the doors of opportunity closed at our colleges.

Last fall, nearly 2,000 *qualified* students were shut out from our 4-year public colleges, including deserving community college transfers. Even worse, we face an estimated unmet need of 22,500 college enrollment opportunities (11,000 at 4-year colleges, 11,500 for community colleges) over the next five years! These needs are growing because higher education funding has suffered in recent years. We must rededicate ourselves to the goal of providing good college opportunities for all who have earned the right to go to college through hard work and success at school.

School Security

School security officers have difficult jobs, and many are not trained to handle situations with a minimum of force. Disturbing evidence also suggests a need for better security training to resolve situations involving students of color. In one Washington school district, African Americans make up 10 percent of the enrolled students, but 59 percent of the students handcuffed by school security. This is why the NAACP has filed tens of millions of dollars in lawsuits related to excessive force in schools.

While handcuffs and force are sometimes necessary, good training of security personnel is always necessary. I'm calling on the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to develop a model policy and training standards regarding the use of force and restraint in schools. My proposal also requires school districts to adopt their own district policies regarding the use of force and provide appropriate annual training. I believe this will help us avoid problems and huge lawsuits that we simply cannot afford.

